Depot Town Rag

Volume 13, Number 2 *"All the news in one block in one month."*

February 1990

Hearts & flowers

Promotions Proposed

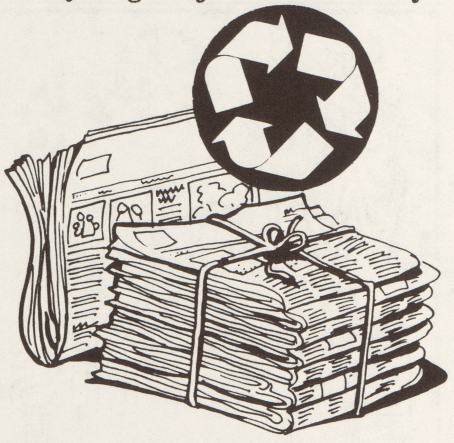
New decor in Coffeeshop

Frog Island & Riverside Park in the 1913 Olmsted plan

. . . and other strictly local stuff!

A Publication of the DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, MI 48198

Working to remove the 'f' in refuse - Recycling Project leads the way



Jazz is back in Depot Town

Heritage Blues Fundraiser - April 21

Robert Penn, Little Sonny, OTIS CLAY and his Chicago R&B in the Freighthouse: $10 advance, $12 at the door

Frog Island Festival - June 21, 22, 23

Heritage Jazz Competition - August 23, 24, 25

After months of set-backs such as rising insurance costs, abandonment of the Freighthouse master plan and lack of volunteers, a committee of local merchants and activitists has forged a new plan to bring back the district's most successful series of promotions.

Meeting on weekday mornings at Aubree's Saloon, Depot Towners have made new inroads to the Heritage Festival planning committee and have put plans in motion for August's Heritage Jazz to return to the district after a year's absence. A special April event will bring the best in the blues to promote the return of the August Heritage Fest tradition.

The usual complement of volunteers are encouraged to make their backing known.

Ypsilanti Recycling Project expands services, space

The Ypsilanti Recycling Project has more than doubled its collection space for newspaper, glass, cardboard and plastic in the past month. Director, Peter Murdock, Recycling coordinator, says, "We used three fence companies, and none of them will want to ever dig here again," referring to the fact that holes are nearly impossible to dig in the former New York Central dumping yard which was filled, mostly, with concrete rubble over the years.

The original fenced area, which covered a 40" x 60" space, is now more than doubled with the addition of the 50" x 60" yard which provides five gates on the north side for access to four roll-out containers. The newly expanded facility now provides drive-through drop-off, with traffic moving north and out the new exit.

The $4500 expansion cost was paid through capital left over from County Salvage Waste Tax.

Seven years of recycling::

- **Newspapers**
- **Cardboard**
- **Aluminum cans**
- **Tin cans**
- **Auto batteries**
- **Plastic beverage bottles**

Income from the recycling is returned to the project for site development, equipment costs, transportation fees, and education.

Robin Leech's

Lifestyles of the Poor and Tired

"And what will the Depot Town DDA do with all that public money? After all, this windfall could net up to $3000 a year!

- The NIFTY Convention Center
- Home of the Winter Olympics
- Invitational World Classic Car Show
- 500-boat Marina at Riverside Park
- Conrail Folksong Festival at trackside restaurant (sound familiar?)
- Super Bowl '92 in Frog Island

More realistic folks suggested they start work in improving parking, signs and maybe even the land for the Signal Tower's replacement on the corner of Cross, River and the railroad tracks.

Ad Valorem Tax approved for DDA

Six and a half years after the creation of the Depot Town Downtown Development Authority, Ypsilanti City Council has approved the second step in the process of directing improvements to the public areas in its historic Depot Town district. Still lacking a formal development plan and the ability to capture raises in property taxes for strictly local public improvements, the DDA's next step is to unify the district by filling in the properties which were omitted in 1984.

The 2 mill tax approved by Council on January 22 will not be applied until the July tax bill and will bring an estimated $3000 to the Authority to pay for operating expenses.

Other than the cost of printing information for City Council, the income is expected to be directed toward the establishment of a formal Development Plan for the District, which could cost as much as $20,000, if Ypsilanti's first (Downtown) plan is any indication. Already, the priorities of that plan include additional parking, the replication of the Signal Tower, tree and flower planting, and destination signs for the district's entrances.

DDA chair, Paul Fetters, of River Artworks, pointed out to Council that the group would be back with even more plans for the continued improvement of this historic commercial district.

Good taste
for only $4.95 !
The Victorian Holiday
COOK BOOK
in many participating businesses
in historic Depot Town

Cook Book sales continue into February

Sally Richie, of the Occasion Station, announces unexpectedly brisk sales of the Cook Book published in December and in many Depot Town shops for the past month.

"It seems like everyone who got their recipes published wanted several copies to send to their friends," said Sally in the ice cream parlor last week.

Copies of the unique publication are still available in participating shops and merchants may pick up more copies at the Occasion Station during regular business hours.

District responds to promotions proposal

The long-promised proposal for upcoming neighborhood promotions went to district business and property owners in late January with final responses due the first of this month to The Old Caboose. Offering both free and paid public events in the neighborhood for virtually every month of the calendar year, the proposal asks for one of three responses in return: (1) Pay a promoter to do such work for the good of the district, (2) Take responsibility to create the event ourselves, or (3) Be totally exempt from the promotions and benefit of such promotions. Recipients of the proposal are urged to make their response this month, or be assumed to be in the third (non benefit) group.

First responses showed some Depot Towners who will continue the past volunteer effort, and a few others in each of the three categories. Nearly all the early returns suggested cutting the proposal to less-than-monthly events, specializing in continuing proven previous successes.

The March issue of *The Rag* will report the results of the promotion and offer a comprehensive plan to execute the districts' desires. Don't miss the opportunity!

February

Hearts and flowers **from the US Postal Service**

Depot Towners declare that David Caswell is a year 'round Valentine, whom they enjoy every day but Sunday. In his thirteenth month of assignment to the district, David says he enjoys his rounds in this old district more than most letter carriers might. Maybe it's the historic buildings, but most likely it's the people, who contriibute to the joviality of Caswell's postal rounds in the district. He makes a distinct contribution, himself.

In his Post Office greys, Depot Town's letter carrier looks like a bearded troll from the Vernor's Ginger Ale label who just might be living under the bridge with his sack of Valentines and monthly bills to shower upon the people who pass his way, but he really drives all the way from Milford to attend to his duties in this part of Ypsilanti. He likes the work, enjoys the neighborhood and makes still another contribution as a colorful and friendly character of the old depot district. He has no complaints about his work.

"The hardest deliveries are the upstairs apartments when I have to get signatures for Special Delivery, but that's always the case with apartments over stores," said Depot Town's mailman on the week before Valentine's Day.

"All of the mailboxes in Depot Town are easy to get to and the sidewalks are reasonably clear. The only bad delivery is when there's stuff for The Old Caboose." DTA's caboose-office is in the Market Plaza and David must climb up the steel steps to deposit in the door's mail slot.

"Most of those little apartment-size mailboxes were just fine in the old days, but with today's 'marriage mailings,' most people really need bigger boxes than these," noted David, as he was folding and stuffing magazines and flyers into a tiny rectangle of stamped steel.

"I especially enjoy the conversations with the many lively merchants in the neighborhood," he continues. "Sometimes I horse around with the folks in the flower shop (Hon's) and then rummage through their dumpster to find flowers to take to people down the block. One time I replaced the plastic flowers at Depot Doo with real ones."

Caswell brings a special charm with him to this old district. He often comments on the quality of the mail and the content of the return addresses. "You didn't get anything today," he told one of the workers at Hon's, "but your husband got another one of *those catalogs*."

As in any small town, the mailman/letter carrier/postal person knows just about everything that's going on, but only in Depot Town does he bring flowers on special occasions.

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February 3
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February 17
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Ike's Depot
Barbershop
40 East Cross

There ~~goes~~ GROWS the neighborhood

DTA president, Paul Fetters, attended a session of the Neighborhood Associations of Michigan (NAM) in Lansing on January 31 to study "assessing your organization's effectiveness." Paul will bring back new insights to the Association, the DDA and his own local business, River Artworks, which celebrates its eleventh year in the district. Neighbors helped Paul's mom run the store while he was in the State Capitol for the event.

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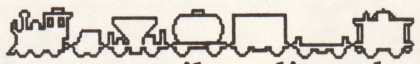

Freighthouse Coffeeshop gets new railroadiana look

"It just seemed like a good time to make a change," said Gary Urick, Market manager, on a recent Saturday morning at the Farmers' Market. And the changes are subtle, but welcome:

Each week another panel of the ancient walls gest a new coat of paint, close to - but just a shade lighter than - the previous cream color. And the growing collection of railroad memorabilia is being collected on one wall, with an elegant collection of reproduction railroad enamelware taking its place around the coffeeshop tables.

Window curtains will soon be added to the ambiance, with prize designs from the 'Country Curtains' classic catalog being chosen for that sunny and happy southern exposure.

The colorful porcelain signs are available to others who wish to continue the district theme in their home and commercial decor, through your note via The Old Caboose.

From the brochure: "The Painted Post Calliope Company is a producer of high quality porcelain signs. Finely ground glass crystals are fired onto an 18 gauge steel blank — the same traditional process that produced the enduring advertising signs of yesteryear. Porcelain signs are at once pleasing to the eye and durable, retaining their rich colors for years indoors or out."

You can purchase porcelain signs like those in the coffeeshop for your collections:

"Look out for mail bag when train passes"
"Western Union Telegraph & Cable Office"
"Railway Express Agency"
"Car Stop"
"For Trainmen Only"
"American Flyer"
"Ives Toys for Happy Boys"
"Lionel Electric Toy Trains"
. . . and a variety of automotive themes, as well.

Prices range from $8 to $24.50 and may be reviewed at any of the Thursday meetings in The Old Caboose for a February order from the company.

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Matrix-Paul Mitchell

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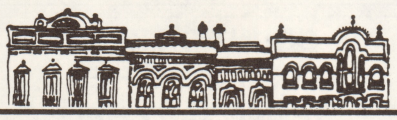
Wed. or Sat. 483-1480or 459-1995 any time.

February CHEESE SALE:
Cojack - $3.39 lb
Swedish Fontina - $4.39
NY White Cheddar - $3.69



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The Depot Town Association, Inc. January 18, 1990

Treasurer's report

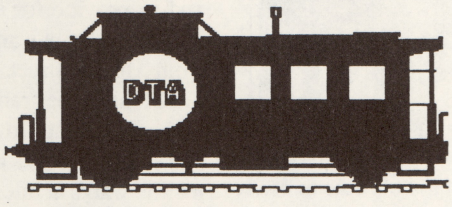
- The DTA general fund has a current balance of $2719.28. A line item breakdown is not available.

- The State sales tax snafu has been addressed and the DTA's record has been cleared.

Standing Committees:

Budget / Events:

- A meeting has been scheduled to address DTA's Frog Island Festival cooperative contract with The Ark. Ark board members will meet with Paul Fetters, Jake Guter, and Carolyn McKeever on Sunday, February 4, at 10 a.m.



- The State Department of Commerce has confirmed the DTA's registration of Festival names.

N.I.F.T.Y. (New Initiative For Tourism in Ypsilanti):

- Jerry Meadows reports that investigation is under way regarding the creation of an intern of promotions position and finding someone to fill it.

The Old Caboose:

- The Caboose is for hire at a reasonable rate of $25. per event. Interested individuals may contact Gary McKeever @ 483-4245.

Rag Report:

- With a vote of 7 for, 2 abstentions, DTA will take on the responsibility of printing the venerable Depot Town publication while payment schedules and invoices are distributed to the paper's sponsors. Treasurer, Judi Monaghan, will begin invoicing upon receipt of current account records. Vice-president, Jake Guter, is authorized to receive payment as the DTA's agent.

- Take note of the addition of volume #s on the Rag's front page, commemorating the 13th year of this circulating monthly.

2nd vice-presidents:

Merchants:

- The merchants are planning a benefit in March for the return of Heritage Festival Jazz in Depot Town. Meetings with promoters are taking place to finalize an evening's entertainment line-up. The Freighthouse is the proposed venue for the event, although no formal contract has been signed.

- The Merchant's cookbook of award-winning recipes is available through local merchants.

Antique Engine Club:

- Due to a club bylaw amendment at the December meeting, the offices of president and vice-president will no longer be limited to a two-year term.

- This equal opportunity organization is addressing the issue of sex equity in organized activities.

Engine Club member, Mabel Fisher, is putting together a cookbook full of Engine Club favorites.

Foundation:

- The Foundation will no longer hold monthly meetings. Future meetings will be announced in *The Depot Town Rag*.

Other business:

- DTA has received no reply from the City regarding the status of the Frieighthouse master plan.

- The Depot Town DDA Ad Valorem tax will be addressed in a public hearing, January 22, at Ypsilanti City Hall.

- A proposal for 'turning out the lights' on the Depot Town 'Welcome' was tabled. The motivation for such action is the dramatization of our area's need for economic restructuring and promotions.

- Depot Town Association president, Paul Fetters, is registering to attend a conference of the Neighborhood Associations of Michigan (NAM) which will be held January 31, in Lansing. The conference will speak to self-assessment of organizations' health and effectiveness.

- The recycling Center fence addition is up, and the recycling center bailer addition is up in the air.

Best Yet: New sponsors in The Rag.

Golden Goose: Those who think they don't benefit from neighborhood promotion.

ATTENTION: Librarians, historians, archivists:

A most elegant cache of recent Ypsilanti history has been assembled!

Eight years of back issues of The Depot Town Rag and a continuous mailing of future issues for half the price of a Patron/Life Membership.

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Tax deductible to nonprofit groups.

February 1990

Depot Towners are invited to participate in any or all of the following activities for the good of this old commercial district:

Development Authority (DDA)
7:30 p.m. Thursday, 2/8
Freighthouse Coffeeshop

Association
7:30 p.m. Thursday, 2/15
The Old Caboose

Antique Engine Club
7:00 p.m. Thursday, 2/22
Freighthouse Coffeeshop

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THE DEPOT TOWN RAG

A publication of the Depot Town Association, Inc. a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to preserving the unique character of the neighborhood and to the enhancement of its business climate.

-Tom Dodd, editor

Depot Town Association, Inc.
Paul Fetters, president
c/o The Old Caboose
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Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

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In Historic Depot Town

YPSILANTI, MICHIGAN

Report Upon Proposed Improvements, forming a basis for a General City Plan

Olmsted Brothers, Landscape Architects, Brookline, Mass. December 31, 1913

Cross Street bridge from Frog Island, showing the abandoned tailrace of the old saw mill on the left which might be utilized as an outlet for a swimming pool.

Frog Island from the Cross Street bridge, showing the fringe of trees on east bank of the river which should be preserved as a screen against the factories.

Frog Island and the Adjacent River Shores.

Frog Island and the adjacent shores of the river between Cross Street and Forest Avenue are now very attractive, and are well adapted for park purposes, although of little value otherwise. The east shore should be acquired as far as the fence along the railway yards; on the west shore a strip of land would be acquired of sufficient width for a path bordered by trees.

With a moderate amount of grading Frog Island could be made into an excellent playground. A swimming pool can be constructed to fill from the sluice above the Deubel Mill and to empty into the river below, by means of gravity flow. (It is to be noted that a similar site for a swimming pool, and possibly a better one is some respects, is to be found on the Barnard Meadows just north of the Water Works dam.)

Central River (Riverside) Park

In the very center of the City of Ypsilanti lies the most attractive site for a public park and yet this site is at present unrecognized and entirely undeveloped. The large tract of low land very near the water level along the west bank of the river between Congress Street and Cross Street now has but little commercial value and is almost unoccupied. It should be acquired by the City while it is still available.

The low land should be protected from floods by a levee and all land so protected should be drained by a pipe extending to a point below the Congress (Michigan Avenue) Street dam. A pipe of moderate size would serve to provide such drainage, as the accumulation of water upon this area after a flood or a heavy rain will be comparatively shallow and need not be carried away rapidly. Trees and shrubs can be grown along the borders of this meadow, but the large central area shoud be kept free for the most part from trees and decorative planting or other improvements to make an attractive open unit that can be used in summer as a playfield and flooded in winter for skating.

The boundary along the west should be established in a way to include most of the steep slope back of the buildings along Huron Street and to provide for entrances from Congress and Cross Streets and one or more entrances from Huron Street. The slope near Huron Street should be gradually filled in accordance with a plan that provides for a better line and slope and for walks at the top and bottom with incline walks at intervals between. Buildings of a public or semi-public character should be located along Huron Street overlooking the park, and a portion of the land between Huron Street and the proposed park should be acquired by the City to provide sites for public buildings.

The question of providing an open space in the center of the City has been raised. The present center is now on Congress Street between Huron and Adams Streets, and to clear a block in that region now would be a costly move that is hardly justifiable. With the great need for redemption of the water front and the bottom lands it would probably be much wiser for Ypsilanti to concentrate all efforts upon securing this area and making of it a civic center which would be bounded by Congress, Huron, Cross and River Streets. Most of this area could be cleared and kept open as a central gathering place with pubic and semi-public buildings grouped along its sides. Already the Library, the Masonic Temple and a church occupy such places. The City Hall, which must soon be rebuilt, could be placed near the Library where it would be near the business center and also in close connection with the east side of the City.

In the March issue:
CONCLUSION
of the Olmsted Brothers'
1913 study of Ypsilanti -
The influence of
The Normal College.

RAGTIME

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